

FIFTY YEARS
OF
WORK FOR THE BLIND IN INDIA

**ISSUED IN COMMEMORATION OF
THE CENTENARY OF THE DEATH
OF LOUIS BRAILLE**



सत्यमेव जयते

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

varied 'pressure groups' that are engaged in furthering their individual interests. The state is a jumble of methods and experiments. All social thinking, therefore, is experimental.

of teaching is found in the behaviour and cultural values which are approved by the fellowship for which the teaching is done.

The ideas expressed by the author are neither startling nor ingenious. He has, however, very clearly and succinctly stated his convictions and observations. The book is thought-provoking and, can well form the basis of a humane and dynamic philosophy of education in the strife-torn world of today.

A. N. Dhawan

Fifty Years of Work for the Blind in India—Issued in Commemoration of the Centenary of the death of Louis Braille. (Ministry of Education, Government of India: 1952).

THIS competent little pamphlet produced on the occasion of the Centenary of Louis Braille's death on the 6th January, 1852, is both a report on what has been done in India and abroad to evolve a uniform Braille Code, and a challenge to the public interested in educational facilities for the blind to maintain and increase them.

The chief problem over the last 50 years appears to have been to secure and maintain a system of Braille signs that will suit people raised in languages derived from widely varying sources.

The question of evolving a uniform code for Indian languages—"Oriental Braille"—was first considered in 1902 by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Great advances have since been made, and in 1941, a Committee was appointed to examine the question anew. It laid down a principle that was destined to shape the future history of Braille—in their education, the blind should not be divided from the seeing. So far as the Braille code

was concerned, this meant that the natural order of the alphabets of various Indian languages should not be disturbed and that spellings in Braille would be the same as in ordinary print. The experts got down to work and produced a code that was approved by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1945. In 1947, the Board reaffirmed its approval of a uniform Indian Braille, and the Government of India recommended its use to all institutions for the blind.

It was a step, if a big step, from this to a World Braille. In March, 1952, UNESCO convened an International Braille Conference at Paris to discuss the question of "World Braille". Important decisions emerged from this Conference but perhaps, the most important of them was that a single Braille script should exist for the entire world, in so far as each Braille symbol would have the same or a similar significance in many languages of the world. But each linguistic area could also have a code of its own within the framework of World Braille. In a word, World Braille was to be a net-work of inter-related Braille codes.

The Beirut Conference of 1951 pushed the matter a step forward by recommending to UNESCO that a Committee be appointed to consider the question of evolving a World Braille of music notation. A World Braille Council has now been formed to maintain the uniformity thus far achieved.

The pamphlet describes the work that has been done for the blind in India—training centres that at present exist and the special awards for which outstanding blind scholars are eligible. Whatever has been done is a drop by comparison with what remains to be done, but the pamphlet is a challenge to those who feel that the loss of one sense—sight—may well be

compensated by the sharpening of other senses, and may endow the subject with special gifts that make him a co-operative citizen.



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FOREWORD

The inventor of the script known by his name, Louis Braille helped to open to the blind the doors of the world of knowledge. Till his time, the blind with rare exceptions were condemned to a darkness of the mind that matched the darkness of their physical world. Louis Braille's invention of the method of reading and writing in raised point is thus a turning point in the history of the education of the blind.

1952 marks the centenary of Braille's death. These hundred years have seen a quickening of the social conscience and a growing recognition of society's obligation towards its less fortunate members. Perhaps the greatest progress in this respect has been in the field of service to the blind. Much of the credit for this should go to Louis Braille.

In India, educational facilities were first offered to the blind some 70 years ago. Since then the State and voluntary agencies have co-operated in extending them. It is perhaps in the fitness of things that Braille's death centenary should be marked by significant achievement in the field. A common script for all the Indian languages—Bharati Braille—has just been finalised. The first full-fledged Braille Printing Press has been set up in India and its first publication issued. The year has also been marked by considerable progress towards greater uniformity in the Braille scripts of all languages of the world.

This brochure is one among the many tributes that will be paid to Louis Braille on the occasion of his death centenary. It gives a brief account of the evolution of a common Braille for Indian languages and also of the development of work for the blind in India. The real tribute to Louis Braille is, however, the affection and gratitude with which millions of the blind throughout the world cherish and will continue to cherish his memory.

HUMAYUN KABIR,
Educational Adviser to
the Government of India.

NEW DELHI,
6th January 1952.

LOUIS BRAILLE

Today, on the 6th January, 1952, we rise to commemorate the death centenary of Louis Braille with whose name has been associated the raised system of reading and writing for the Blind. Born in 1809 in a village near Paris, blinded at the age of 3 as a result of an accident, Louis Braille entered the famous L'Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles in 1819. He learnt to read at the feet of Valentin Haüy who is known as the father of the education of the Blind and founder of the L'Institution Nationale. Louis Braille learnt to read the Valentin Haüy code and like many other of his fellow pupils felt the need of an embossed type which could be both *read and written*. Braille had a brilliant career in the Institution and was appointed an instructor. He filled up his spare time in other worth-while activities. The chief among them was devising a system through which the blind could both read and write. Braille was a silent worker and through his efforts and experimentations he found out facts on which he could build. He realized once for all that the secret of writing for the blind and the success of this system lay in the raised dot. He, therefore, diminished the dimension of Barbier's twelve-dot letter to an oblong cell of six possible dots, easily recognizable by the finger-tip. Thus the dot system triumphed over the line-types. Braille completed his great task in 1829, though amendments were subsequently made in 1834. The code was officially accepted in 1854. It may be seen, as we commemorate the death anniversary of this great man that the Braille system which was officially accepted in 1854 will have its centenary celebration two years hence. It is also interesting to note that till his final amendments were made in 1834 Braille must have worked about 15 years to bring his system to perfection. He lived 18 years more to use this system, yet when he died in 1852 he himself did not know that the year 1854 would see the code officially accepted.

Again, as we commemorate the death anniversary of Louis Braille and the triumph of the dot system, we cannot forget the trio, Valentin Haüy, Charles Barbier and Louis Braille himself, all of them Frenchmen who contributed much to the evolution of a system of writing and reading for the Blind. We also expect that in two years from now the centenary of the official acceptance of the Braille code will be celebrated in 1954. During this century the education and welfare of the Blind have passed through many stages of development and the Blind ^{are} beginning to be integrated into society, but of all the developments Braille's contribution in evolving a tangible script for both reading and writing has remained

unsurpassed. Today, a hundred years after the death of its promoter, Braille has been universally accepted as the most practical system and has been given the status of the World script for the Blind. It is confidently hoped that centenary celebrations of the official acceptance of Braille in 1954 will see many Braille books published in Indian languages from the Central Braille Printing Press of the Government of India. The progress that has been made in other fields in the welfare of the blind in this country will be detailed in pages that follow, but before we turn to these pages let us pay our homage to this blind boy from a French village, who has revolutionized the education of the Blind in the world. His silent work as a teacher, clear thinking, persistent endeavours and indomitable courage of his conviction should be imitated by many of us both blind and sighted.



Finger Reading by the Blind

EVOLUTION OF A COMMON BRAILLE CODE FOR INDIAN LANGUAGES

The centenary of Louis Braille's death is a fitting occasion for reviewing the efforts made in this country to evolve a satisfactory common Braille code for Indian languages. These efforts are of special significance, for, they represent a new and unique experiment in the application of Braille. India was probably the first country to try to evolve a single Braille code for such a large number of languages using divergent scripts. It is no surprise, therefore, that a number of experiments should have been made during the past fifty years. This may have caused a great deal of inconvenience and disappointment to the users of Braille and to authorities responsible for the education of the blind, but experiments become inevitable in trying to find a solution to a highly intricate problem like the present one.

From the time the first school for the blind was established in India in the eighties of the last century, each school before it could start, had to draw up or adapt a Braille code for the reading and writing of the language of the area which it served. Since the beginning of the present century efforts were also made by enthusiastic individuals and even by committees of experts to evolve Braille codes which could meet the needs of all Indian languages. Thus a number of Braille codes came into being of which the following are the principal ones:—

- (1) Shirreff Braille.
- (2) Indian Braille of Dr. Nilkanthrai.
- (3) Tamil Braille of Miss Askwith.
- (4) Mysore & Kannada Code.
- (5) Chatterjee Code.
- (6) Oriental Braille by Rev. J. Knowles and Mr. L. Garthwaite.
- (7) Shah Braille.
- (8) Sindhi Braille of Mr. P. M. Advani.
- (9) Uniform Indian Braille framed by the Expert Braille Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education.
- (10) Standard Indian Braille framed by an informal committee under the chairmanship of Lt. Col. Sir Clutha Mackenzie.

It will perhaps be worthwhile to make at least a passing reference here to the basic principles underlying the above codes. It seems that most of the codes were based on one or more of the following three broad principles:—

- (a) The assignment of common Braille symbols to common sounds between English and Indian languages.
- (b) Adherence to the original sequence of Braille symbols.
- (c) The assignment of related Braille symbols to phonetically related Indian letters.

In one instance the Braille signs were re-arranged so as to give them both vertical and horizontal symmetry.

While the diversity of Braille codes made the education of the blind extremely difficult, it made it possible for the various principles to be tried out in practice, although it is difficult to say if any conclusive results were obtained. In this connection it is also interesting to note that experiments in this country were confined to trying out Braille in varying forms, but practically no experiments were made with any of the raised line systems of reading invented for the blind in the West.

The first effort at evolving a single Braille code for all Indian languages was made at the beginning of the present century by Rev. J. Knowles and Mr. L. Garthwaite. Their scholarly piece of work "ORIENTAL BRAILLE" was published in 1902 by the British and Foreign Bible Society. It was an ambitious scheme and aimed at providing a single Braille code for all oriental languages.

The next effort was made by Mr. P. M. Advani who attended a meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in January 1922 and explained to the Board his conception of a common Braille code for Indian languages. At this meeting the Board recommended the appointment of a committee to go into this question and the establishment of an up-to-date Braille Printing Press. But unfortunately, these recommendations of the Board could not be implemented earlier on account of the financial stringency prevailing in the country at that time.

A year later a conference of workers for the blind met in Bombay to consider this question and recommended that all the existing codes should be thoroughly tested and a report made to the conference as to which of them was most suitable for being accepted as the standard Braille code for the country. The proposed report, however, could not be made, for the conference did not meet again.

The matter came up again before the Central Advisory Board of Education at its meetings in 1936 and in 1938, but no decision was taken. The matter was once again referred to the Board in 1941,

when it recommended the appointment of a committee to examine this question. Accordingly, a committee consisting of 14 members was appointed and met in New Delhi in November 1941. After carefully considering the problem in all its various aspects this committee laid down certain basic principles for the drawing up of a uniform Braille code for Indian languages. It also recommended the appointment of a small Expert Committee to work out the code in accordance with the principles that had been laid down.

One of the principles laid down by this committee is of particular significance and should perhaps be mentioned here. This principle was that in their education the blind should not be segregated from the sighted. As far as the drawing up of a Braille code was concerned, this meant that the natural order of the alphabets of the various Indian languages should not be disturbed and that the mode of spelling in Braille should be exactly the same as in ordinary print; or, in other words, that a Braille page should be a complete tactile representation of the printed page. This principle has been almost universally accepted and its acceptance by the Committee was a landmark in the history of the adaptation of Braille to Indian languages.

An Expert Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education was appointed in 1942 to draw up a uniform Braille code in accordance with the principles laid down by the larger committee in 1941. In 1943 the code drawn up by the Expert Committee was circulated for opinion to all the provincial and State Governments and to all institutions for the blind. The comments received were generally favourable and the code was approved by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1945.

Later in 1945 an informal committee was formed under the chairmanship of Lt. Col. Sir Clutha Mackenzie, which drew up Standard Indian Braille. A meeting between representatives of the informal committee and the Expert Braille Committee was held in New Delhi in April 1946, to discuss both Uniform Indian Braille and Standard Indian Braille and to decide as to which of them should be accepted as the common Braille code for Indian languages. But members of the Expert Braille Committee were not convinced by the arguments put forward by the representatives of the informal committee. The matter was, therefore, referred back to the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1947. The Board reaffirmed its approval of Uniform Indian Braille and the Government of India recommended its use in all institutions for the blind in the country.

This did not however end the controversy which was continued by experts within the country and abroad. In 1948 Government of India decided to review the question in order to explore if it was

possible to frame a Braille code for Indian languages which would maintain the maximum degree of uniformity not only between Indian languages but also with other major languages of the world. The principle of uniformity which had formed the basis of Uniform Indian Braille and other important Indian Braille codes, namely, the principle of assigning the same Braille symbol to common letters and sounds in Indian languages, was thus sought to be extended to all the major languages of the world.)

The Government of India was further of the opinion that the question of a uniform Braille Script should be lifted from the arena of debate and studied in a dispassionate and objective manner. This alone could create conditions in which the possibility of a World Braille could be considered in the proper scientific spirit. Since this was essentially a world problem, the Government of India requested UNESCO to initiate an exploratory study of the question. UNESCO responded warmly to this suggestion and appointed a Braille Consultant to make a preliminary survey of the world Braille situation. After the Braille Consultant had made a preliminary survey, the Director-General, UNESCO appointed an Advisory Committee which met in Paris in December 1949. India was represented on this Committee by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a member of the Indian Expert Braille Committee. The Advisory Committee came to the conclusion that the evolution of a single Braille script for the world was both desirable and practicable. It also suggested the broad principles on which such a script should be based, but it recommended that these principles should be carefully considered by a more representative international conference before they were finally accepted.

Accordingly, UNESCO convened an International Braille Conference in Paris in March 1950 which was attended among others by experts from the United Kingdom, the United States, France, India, Ceylon, Malaya, China and Japan. After carefully considering the views put forward by the various experts, the Conference endorsed the earlier conclusion of the Advisory Committee that the evolution of a single Braille script for the world was both desirable and practicable. It also confirmed the finding of the Advisory Committee that unquestionably the best means to this end lay in expanding the generalized Braille policy laid down by the International Congress in Paris in 1878 in the following terms: "The Congress is overwhelmingly in favour of the extension of the Braille system without modifications".

It should be mentioned here that some experts at the Conference pointed out that the main difficulty in achieving a substantial measure of international consistency in Braille usage was that some countries would have to depart from the original sequence of

Braille signs. These experts feared that departure from the original arrangement of signs might lead to difficulties in teaching. The experts who attended the Conference, however, held that modern methods of teaching did not make use of the symmetrical arrangement. Exponents of the new methods pointed out that experience had proved the advantage of introducing Braille signs to the beginner in the order of the ease with which they could be recognized rather than the traditional method of introducing them in the order of their original arrangement by Braille. This view was accepted by the Conference and its main recommendations were based on the assumption that wherever necessary the original sequence of Braille symbols would be abandoned.

The Conference recommended that the proposed single Braille script should be known as "World Braille". The Conference also provided a comprehensive definition of the term "World Braille". It reads: "(a) The policy in the main and as far as circumstances permit provides that each sign shall be used for the same or nearly the same sound as in the original Braille, shall represent the same letter and mark, or shall fulfil the same or similar function.

"(b) Except where the complexities of ideographic scripts make it impossible, a Braille symbol should be provided for each visual letter, it being understood that the sound value of this symbol is identical with that of the visual letter and mark of the alphabet of the particular language which it represents.

"(c) World Braille, therefore, should aim primarily at being a complete tactile representation of the visual script of the language concerned; secondly, at maintaining the closest uniformity between that language and other languages of the same group linguistically or by virtue of using the same script; thirdly, at achieving the maximum degree of consistency with the Braille systems of the other language groups."

It is clear from the above definition that World Braille would be a single Braille script for the world in so far as each Braille symbol would have the same or similar significance in many languages of the world. But each major linguistic area can also have a separate code within the framework of the definition of World Braille to suit its peculiar needs. In other words, World Braille will be a net-work of inter-related Braille codes.

The Conference recommended the convening of three regional Braille conferences, one for countries using the Arabic script, the second for countries using the ideographic scripts and the third for countries using Spanish Braille. The object of the first two regional Braille conferences was to try to bring about regional Braille uniformity in these areas.

Another important recommendation of the conference was that a small World Braille Council should be established under UNESCO to maintain the uniformity that had been achieved. The Conference recommended that the proposed World Braille Council should have the following functions:—

- (a) To act in an advisory capacity on the interpretation and application of Braille principles.
- (b) To co-ordinate future Braille development.
- (c) To advise on such Braille problems as might be referred to it from time to time.
- (d) To act as a centre for the collection of information on Braille.

Since Braille is not only used for expressing orthographic writing but also for various other purposes, the Conference also considered the possibility of achieving international uniformity in the Braille representation of music notation and mathematical and scientific symbols. But the Conference was not able to make any definite recommendations on the subject. It, therefore, recommended that this problem should be dealt with by the World Braille Council when it was formed.

The International Braille Conference in Paris was an important milestone in the rationalization and development of Braille. It is perhaps a strange coincidence that it should have been held in the country of birth of the author of the Braille system. Incidentally, it might be mentioned that all the delegates to the Conference visited the small village of Coupvray, where Louis Braille was born, to pay their homage to the great inventor.

On the advice of the Expert Braille Committee the Government of India accepted the recommendations of the International Braille Conference and proceeded to frame a Braille code for Indian languages in the light of these recommendations. The new code was named Bharati Braille. It was submitted to the Central Advisory Board of Education at its 18th meeting in January 1951. The Board approved the code in principle and recommended that necessary minor modifications might be made in the light of the recommendations of the regional Braille Conference originally proposed for countries of the Middle East which was expected to be held shortly.

At the suggestion of the Government of India the scope of the regional conference originally proposed for countries of the Middle East was expanded to include experts from South East Asia. Consequently, experts from India, Malaya, Ceylon, Persia, and

countries of the Middle East attended the Middle East and South East Asian Regional Conference on Braille Uniformity which was held at Beirut in February 1951. The main task before the Beirut Conference was to work out an agreed Braille code for languages using the Arabic script and to try to bring about agreement on several important details between the Braille systems for India, Ceylon and Malaya. The Conference achieved a substantial degree of success in dealing effectively with these problems. Complete accord was achieved between Bharati and Sinhalese Brailles. A very substantial degree of uniformity was also achieved between Bharati and Malay Brailles. On account of great orthographic differences it was not possible to achieve the same measure of consistency between Bharati Braille and the Braille code for countries using the Arabic script. Nevertheless the degree of uniformity that could be achieved between these two systems was by no means small.

The Beirut Conference went a step further than the International Braille Conference in Paris by suggesting a set of rules for writing in Braille which could be universally applied. The object of these rules was to bring about uniformity in the methods of printing. Uniformity in this sphere will undoubtedly be of great advantage to both the users and producers of Braille literature.

The Beirut Conference also adopted a resolution recommending to UNESCO to appoint a committee to consider the question of evolving a World Braille Music Notation.

The Government of India accepted the recommendations of the Beirut Conference and agreed to introduce some minor modifications in Bharati Braille. But unfortunately, Bharati Braille and the Braille code for Urdu in Pakistan were widely divergent as they emerged out of the discussions at Beirut. This was due mainly to the close orthographic affinity of Urdu with languages using the Arabic script as well as with Indian languages. The Government of India, however, felt that it would be a great advantage to the blind in both the countries if complete uniformity between Bharati Braille and the Braille code for Urdu in Pakistan could be achieved. UNESCO was also anxious to help in promoting Braille uniformity between the two countries. It, therefore, made certain suggestions to the Governments of India and Pakistan. The reaction of the Government of Pakistan to these suggestions is not yet known, but the Government of India have accepted most of UNESCO's suggestions in the hope that their acceptance might lead to complete Braille uniformity between the two countries in the near future.

Thus, Bharati Braille has been practically finalized. The final charts are under preparation and are expected to be published shortly. Since there is complete agreement between Bharati and

Sinhalese Brailles a chart of Sinhalese Braille will also be published along with the charts of other Indian languages. A set of rules for reading and writing in Bharati Braille has also been agreed upon and will be published along with the charts.

It is hoped that Bharati Braille which is the outcome of many experiments and of a number of discussions between experts in this country and abroad, will serve the purpose for which it has been framed. It is also hoped that the uniformity which Bharati Braille has been able to achieve with other major languages of the world will be of real value to the blind of this and other countries.

It was represented to the Government of India that an opportunity should be provided for teachers of the blind to learn the new code. The Government of India have, therefore, decided to hold a short refresher course in Bharati Braille at Dehra Dun in March 1952.

With the evolution of Bharati Braille the first phase of the task of adapting Braille to Indian languages has been completed. Work has now to begin on the second phase, namely, the framing of contractions and abbreviations for the various Indian languages. This phase is as important as the first one. Uniformity in contracted Braille is extremely difficult and it must necessarily be very limited. This problem will, therefore, have to be approached from a completely new angle. It seems that perhaps each major language would have to have a separate contracted form of Braille which would conform to certain broad principles that might be agreed upon by experts.

In view of the great importance of contracted forms of Braille, the Government of India have decided to appoint a committee to examine the question of framing suitable contractions and abbreviations for Hindi which is the national language. The question of drawing up suitable contracted forms of Braille for other major Indian languages may be taken up later.

It should perhaps be emphasized here that voluntary initiative of experts individually or collectively will be of great help in the speedy and satisfactory accomplishment of this task as it was in the evolution of an uncontracted Braille code for Indian languages. The Government of India will welcome suggestions from experts on this subject.

Another important task that remains to be accomplished is the framing of a suitable Braille music notation for the country, for music has great economic and cultural value to the blind. It seems, however, that there is great scope for the attainment of international consistency in this Braille field. The Government of India have, therefore, requested UNESCO to investigate the possibility of

evolving a single Braille music notation for the world. Meanwhile, the Government of India are also considering the question of appointing a small committee to examine the possibility of framing a suitable Braille music notation for this country. The Government of India will welcome suggestions from experts on this subject also.

One more Braille field in which international consistency can be achieved to a very large extent is the Braille representation of mathematical and scientific symbols. UNESCO is considering the possibility of undertaking a study of this problem with a view to bringing about the maximum degree of uniformity in this Braille field.

Recently, UNESCO appointed a Consultative Committee to advise the Director-General on the constitution of the World Braille Council recommended by the International Braille Conference held in Paris in March 1950. The Consultative Committee met in Paris in December 1951 and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a member of the Indian Expert Braille Committee, was elected its Chairman. It is understood that UNESCO is considering the question of setting up the proposed World Braille Council this year and that the problem of achieving international consistency in the Braille representation of music notation and mathematical and scientific symbols will receive the urgent attention of the Council as soon as it is formed. The establishment of the World Braille Council will open a new chapter in the history of the international development of Braille.

It is also understood that in pursuance of the recommendations of the International Braille Conference UNESCO will shortly publish a master reference work on Braille, for the guidance of teachers and workers for the blind. This work will also contain the proposed World Braille chart.

It is clear from the foregoing paragraphs that there has been a great revival of interest in Braille problems during the past few years not only in this country but in many other parts of the world. India can take some legitimate pride in having initiated these discussions, but the revival of interest which has followed is largely due to the keen personal interest taken by the Director-General of UNESCO.

Before closing this short history of the development of Braille it might be mentioned that like India, countries using the Arabic script have also for the first time evolved a common Braille code for that area. They are also working on the framing of a satisfactory contracted form of Braille for that area. It is understood that Braille printing has already begun in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Indonesia has also framed a new Braille code for its

official language Bahasa, which is in conformity with the definition of World Braille laid down by the International Braille Conference in Paris.

This revival of interest is not confined to Asian countries where Braille development had lagged behind, but is also visible in the more advanced countries. A committee, known as the Joint Uniform Braille Type Committee, has been appointed in the United States. This Committee is also considering the problem of international consistency in the Braille representation of music notation and mathematical and scientific symbols. This Committee is also re-examining Standard English Braille which was worked out in its present form in 1932. A Committee in Britain is trying to work out an internationally acceptable Braille code for mathematics. This widespread interest in Braille problems will, it is hoped, result in lasting benefit to the users of Braille throughout the world.

Today, a hundred years after the death of Louis Braille, Braille has been given the status of a world script for the blind. This fact is perhaps the best tribute to the memory of Louis Braille.

DEVELOPMENT OF WORK FOR THE BLIND IN INDIA

The history of work for the blind in this country is basically the same as in other countries. The treatment given to the blind by society has varied considerably according to the religious and social trends prevalent at different periods. The blind have been the objects of pity and sentimentalism, of cruelty and humiliation; and yet they have also been treated with great kindness and occasionally given opportunities to develop their innate capabilities. They have been regarded as helpless beings and yet some of them have been respected and acclaimed for their scholastic and other attainments.

Organized work for the education and welfare of the blind is, however, comparatively recent in this country and is still in the initial stages of development. Its advent can perhaps be traced back to the establishment of the first school for the blind at Amritsar in 1887. This school subsequently moved to Rajpur, Dehra Dun, where it still exists and is known as the Sharp Memorial School for the Blind. It is one of the few schools for blind girls in this country. Two more schools, namely, the School for the Blind, Palayamcottai, and the Calcutta Blind School were established before the close of the last century. Two other important schools, namely, The Dadar School for the Blind, formerly known as American Mission School for the Blind, the Victoria Memorial School for the Blind were established in Bombay at the beginning of the present century.

These pioneer schools were the forerunners of a number of schools and other establishments which have come into being in different parts of the country during the first half of this century. At present there are about fifty institutions for the blind in the country and about 1,500 blind children and adults are receiving education and vocational training in these institutions. Most of them admit children and impart elementary education and training in a few simple handicrafts. The Training Centre for the Adult Blind, Dehra Dun and one or two other institutions also cater to the needs of blind adults. Maintenance as well as training is provided free of cost by most of the institutions.

In addition to the educational institutions for the blind, there are also a few associations of the blind like the Blind Men's Association, Surat and the Blind Persons' Association, Calcutta, which are doing what they can to promote the welfare of the blind.

Voluntary effort has played an important role in the development of work for the blind in this country, and the majority of the institutions for the blind are still run by charitable organizations. The State Governments have also been trying to help these institutions. This is clear from the fact that out of 24 institutions under private management which recently answered a questionnaire circulated by the Government of India only two of them were not receiving any financial assistance from Government.

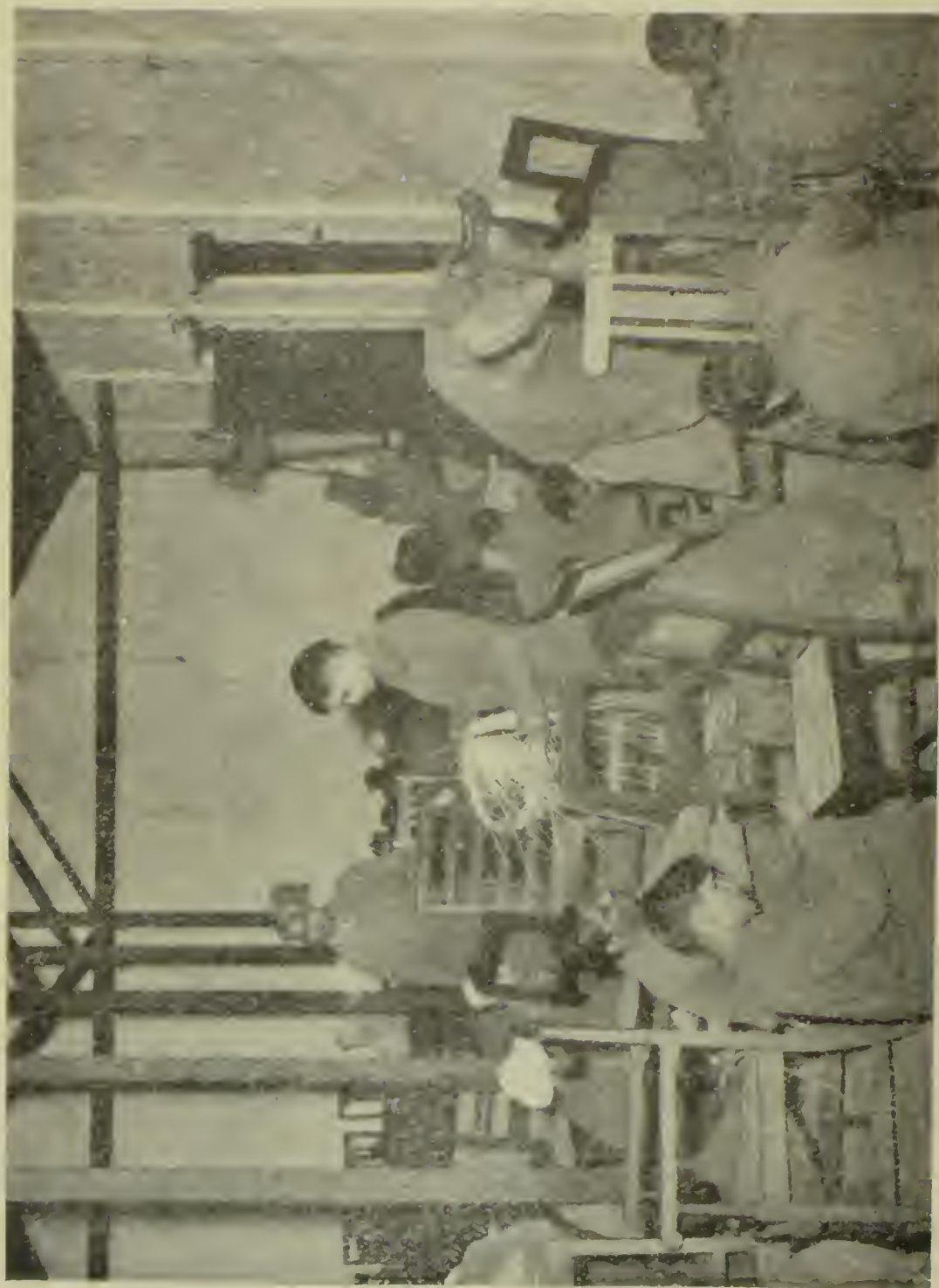
Governments at the Centre and in the States are not only giving financial aid to institutions under private management but are also administering some of the institutions themselves. At present there are about 11 Government institutions for the blind in the country, three of which are managed by the Government of India.

During the last four years the Government of Madras has opened three new schools for the blind and has also taken over the administration of the former Victory Memorial School for the Blind, now known as the Government School for the Blind, Madras.

It is clear from what has just been said that of late Governments have been taking an increasing interest in the education and welfare of the blind. One of the earliest and the most important steps taken by the Government of India in this direction was the appointment of the Joint Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education and Health in 1943. The Joint Committee was charged with the task of inquiring into the causes and extent of blindness and making suitable recommendations to the Government of India. The Joint Committee submitted its report in 1944, and made a number of valuable recommendations both for the prevention of blindness and for the welfare of the blind. "THE REPORT ON BLINDNESS IN INDIA", submitted by the Joint Committee continues to be the most reliable document available to teachers and workers for the blind.

The Government of India have accepted in principle the major recommendations of the "REPORT ON BLINDNESS IN INDIA" and are taking steps to implement them. One of the major recommendations of the Report is the establishment of Councils on Blindness in the States and at the Centre. Accordingly the Government of India have recommended to all the State Governments to consider the possibility of forming State Councils on Blindness. Three states, namely, Bombay, PEPSU and Hyderabad have already formed such Councils.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that the function of the Central and State Councils on Blindness will not be merely to act as advisory bodies, but to take effective measures for the prevention



TRAINEES AT WORK

of blindness and for providing better welfare services for the blind. They would have to grapple with the enormous task of marshalling all available resources of money and good-will for the social, educational and economic advancement of the blind.

In order to take practical steps for promoting the education and welfare of the blind, in 1947 the Government of India instituted a special unit under the Ministry of Education to deal with this problem along with the problems of other handicapped groups. Since then the Government of India have been working on several plans designed to provide better educational and training facilities to the blind. Some of these plans have already been implemented, chief among them being the establishment of the Training Centre for the Adult Blind at Dehra Dun.

The Training Centre for the Adult Blind, was formerly known as St. Dunstan's Hostel for the Indian War-Blinded and it was started in 1943. It was intended for the training and resettlement of blinded ex-servicemen of World War II. It grew to be one of the biggest and the best organizations in this country for the training of blind adults. It trained nearly 300 blinded ex-servicemen and helped many of them to resettle in their own villages and towns. St. Dunstan's maintains a permanent organization for the after-care of its former trainees.

The majority of the blinded ex-servicemen had completed their training by the end of 1949 and the Government of India took over the administration of the Hostel with effect from the 1st January, 1950. It has now been thrown open to both the war-blinded and to the civilian blind. At present 125 blind adults from various parts of the country are undergoing training at the Centre. They are being trained in a number of simple trades like weaving, canework, knitting, paper-bag-making, poultry farming etc. Steps are also being taken to introduce the teaching of plastic work. Music is also taught to trainees who have the necessary talent. All trainees are given simple academic education through the medium of Braille and typewriting is taught to trainees with a sufficient knowledge of English. In addition to free training, the Centre also provides free of cost board, lodging, clothing and other amenities of life. The Government of India are spending about Rs. 2,50,000 on the Centre annually. R

The Government of India are aware of the fact that one of the most difficult problems facing the blind is the problem of employment. Attempts are therefore being made to explore possibilities of absorbing trained blind persons in ordinary industry and to provide such training at the Centre as would enable the trainees to be absorbed in ordinary industry. But on account of the peculiar



BRAILLE PRINTING MACHINE

conditions prevailing in this country it seems that there is a pressing need for sheltered industry for the blind. In view of this need the Government of India have decided shortly to establish a sheltered workshop as part of the Training Centre for the Adult Blind. This workshop will provide remunerative employment to about a dozen blind men in the first instance. It might be possible to expand the workshop if the initial experiment is successful.

Another important development is the establishment of the Central Braille Printing Press at Dehra Dun. It is the first Press of its kind in this country and perhaps in South East Asia. It has already brought out its first book in Hindi. It is at present somewhat handicapped for want of adequate accommodation and the necessary raw materials. But the new buildings for the Press which are now under construction, are expected to be ready within a few months and supplies of the necessary raw materials are expected shortly. It will then be possible for the Press to increase the production of Braille literature. Perhaps in the initial stages the Braille Printing Press would have to confine itself to the production of books in Hindi only, but attempts will be made to publish books in other major Indian languages as early as possible.

The establishment of the Braille Printing Press in this country will undoubtedly be a fitting tribute to the memory of Louis Braille if it succeeds in removing the major obstacle in the way of the education of the blind—the lack of adequate text-books.

On a number of occasions it has been represented to the Government of India by institutions for the blind that the importing of apparatus and appliances used in the education of the blind from abroad involves great inconvenience and delay. The Government of India are therefore considering the possibility of importing some simple appliances and stocking them in the Braille Printing Press at Dehra Dun. The appliances could then be easily obtained by blind individuals and institutions for the blind.

During the past year the Government of India have established two schools for blind children: one at Ajmer and the other at Vandhay, Kutch. The School at Ajmer is to be developed as a model School for all Hindi-speaking centrally administered areas.

Although the present number of schools for the blind in the country can hardly be regarded as adequate for providing education and training to all educable blind children and adults, it seems that considerable progress has been made during the last two or three decades in the establishment of schools and training centres. But enough progress does not appear to have been made towards providing facilities for higher education and advanced professional training for the gifted blind person. The major obstacle in the way of the gifted blind person is not so much the lack of adequate

institutions where he can be trained but the lack of funds. The gifted blind person can generally be educated or trained in an ordinary institution, but he often finds it difficult to pay for his education. In view of this fact the Government of India, in consultation with State Governments, have decided to institute about a dozen post-school scholarships for the blind. The object of these scholarships will be to enable blind students with outstanding ability to receive higher education or advanced professional training.

R ✓ While it has not yet been possible for the Government of India to enact special legislation for the benefit of the blind, it has fortunately been possible to grant certain concessions to them. Reduced postal rates for Braille literature have been in existence in this country for a considerable time. Since 1949 the Government of India have allowed remission of customs duty on tangible apparatus and appliances when these appliances are imported by recognised public institutions for the blind. Certain Railway concessions have also been granted to the blind. The main feature of these concessions is that a blind student or a blind member of staff of a recognised institution for the blind can travel with a sighted companion by paying a single fare for both. Although, at present, the scope of these concessions is rather limited, they are no doubt of great help to blind students and to blind persons working in recognised institutions for the blind.

The purpose of the foregoing paragraphs is briefly to review the progress that has been made in this country in providing educational facilities and other welfare services for the sightless. It is clear that while a great deal has been done much remains to be achieved. Some aspects of the work have received practically no attention. For instance, it has not yet been possible to make any financial provisions for the elderly blind, or to provide homes and other amenities for the unemployable blind. It has also not been possible to provide facilities for the care of pre-school blind children or for the doubly handicapped. There also appears to be great need for educating the general public as to the capabilities of the blind so that blind persons may be able to secure suitable employment after they have been trained, for, organised work for the blind will be in vain if trained blind persons do not succeed in finding suitable employment. These are but a few of the urgent problems that have to be tackled.

But perhaps it will be well to emphasize here the importance of voluntary effort in dealing with these problems. Combined efforts by the State and by voluntary agencies alone can bring about speedy progress. It is therefore of the greatest importance that voluntary agencies should take the initiative not only in developing the existing services but also in sponsoring new activities. In

this connection mention should perhaps be made of the All-India Conference for the Blind, held in Bombay from the 19th to the 21st January 1952. The declared object of the Conference was to establish a National Association for the Blind on the lines of the National Institute for the Blind, London. The Conference will undoubtedly have done great service to the blind and to the cause of voluntary effort if it succeeds in bringing into being an organisation which can take effective measures for promoting the well-being of the blind.

In conclusion it might be said that the best tribute that this country can pay to the memory of Louis Braille will be to provide better educational facilities and more efficient welfare services to the blind. Therefore, let the present year be a year of renewed endeavour for the betterment of the blind.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX-I

No. F.1-2/48-D2

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

New Delhi, the 23rd April, 1949.

From

PROF. HUMAYUN KABIR,

Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

To

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL,

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION.

UNESCO HOUSE, AVENUE KLEBER, PARIS—16.

SIR,

I have the honour to draw your attention to a problem the resolution of which would help to lighten the burden of the blind in all countries of the world. I need not dilate on the handicaps from which they suffer nor the steps taken till now in helping them to become useful citizens. One of the foremost of these is the invention of the Braille script through which unsighted persons have been enabled to read and write. Unfortunately, however, the advantages of this great discovery have been minimized on account of the different ways in which the same Braille symbols are used for different sounds in different languages.

The number of the blind in any country is small and it is obvious that the State can spend only a fraction of its resources for their education. Production of literature in Braille is at the same time difficult and expensive. The fact that the scripts differ from one country to another has prevented the production of literature in Braille on a sufficiently large scale and thus added to the cost of an already expensive process. It is surprising, but till 1932 even English speaking countries did not have a uniform system of Braille.

In India, with its ten or eleven major languages, the problem of different scripts has been one of the major obstacles to the provision of larger facilities for education of the blind. The Government of India, therefore, appointed in 1941 a Committee to investigate the possibility of evolving a uniform system of Braille for the whole country. This Committee included among its members distinguished linguists and phoneticians and after six years' work, evolved a system known as Uniform Indian Braille to cover all the Indian languages. Some idea of the difficulties the Committee had to face and the measure of success achieved may be obtained from the fact that these Indian scripts are derived from sources so different as the Sanskritic, the Arabic, the Dravidian, and in the case of some of the tribal languages, the Roman. The Government of India have accepted the recommendations of that Committee and we have now taken in hand plans for setting up a Press for printing suitable literature in all the Indian languages in one Uniform Braille script.

Sir Clutha Mackenzie, who is a distinguished expert on Braille, has drawn our attention to the desirability of trying to extend this process of unification still further. He suggests that there is a greater possibility of evolving an international script in the case of Braille than in the case of visual scripts. He has pointed out that in Braille, the Slavonic scripts have been affiliated to the Roman. Our experience in India shows that even Sanskritic and Arabic scripts can be brought within one uniform system. The Government of India feel that if such a uniform international Braille can be evolved by agreement in the same way as English Braille was standardized in 1932 by agreement between the English speaking countries of the world, it will not only mark a great step towards the unification of the world but also prove of immense advantage to the blind of all countries.

As I have stated above, the Government of India are now proceeding with preparations for setting up of a Press in order to produce the necessary literature in Uniform Indian Braille. The preliminary work in this connection is likely to take a year or so. Once, however, the process of printing in Uniform Indian Braille has begun, it would be difficult and involve financial wastage if we had to switch on to a different script. I am informed that there is also a move in the Arabic speaking world to evolve one uniform Braille for all the Arab countries. The Government of India, therefore, feel that now is the time, before these new systems have been brought into vogue, to take up the question of one uniform Braille for the whole world.

I would, therefore, request you to examine whether it would be possible to have the question of uniform world Braille considered at

the time of the next General Conference of the UNESCO in September this year. Fortyfive Member-States and many of the important international organisations will be sending their delegations to the Conference in any case. In addition, it is likely that there will be observers from some Non-Member-States. If you agree that the question of a world Braille may be raised during the Conference, and include information to that effect in the invitations to Member-States and participating agencies, it is possible that some, if not all, of them may include among their delegates or observers persons with special knowledge of this problem.

As I view the problem, the question of world Braille reduces to the preparation of a Braille which will satisfy the needs of the Roman, Latin, the Slavonic, the Arabic, the Indian and the Chinese scripts. Representatives of these scripts are included among the Member-States of the UNESCO, and even if no decision can be taken during the General Conference in 1949, sufficient preliminary work may be done for a satisfactory settlement of the problem at the time of the Plenary Session in 1950. I may add that as far as I can judge, adoption of such a scheme would not impose any extra burden of expenditure on the UNESCO. UNESCO's role, as I see it, would be to act as the clearing house and perhaps also as the catalytic agency, but the actual cost of production of literature in the world Braille, when evolved, would be the responsibility of the countries concerned.

You are perhaps aware that the National Institute for the Blind are now preparing for a ten day international conference on blind welfare in Oxford during August this year. The conference is restricted to representatives from Europe and North America, but I have written to Sir Clutha Mackenzie to examine whether it is possible to associate with the conference at least three experts of the Perso-Arabic languages, the Chinese group and India in order to have a preliminary discussion on World Braille. I, however, feel that the initiative in this matter must come from the UNESCO, though obviously UNESCO would, for the purpose, request the co-operation of national organizations like the Foundation for the Blind in America, the American Printing House for the Blind, the National Institute for the Blind in England, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and other similar organisations elsewhere.

Yours faithfully,

HUMAYUN KABIR

Joint Secretary to the

Government of India.

APPENDIX II

EXTRACTS FROM LETTER NO. MMT/275.145, DATED THE 27TH DECEMBER, 1951, FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, UNESCO TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, NEW DELHI.

.....Since April, 1949, when your Government requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to examine the possibility of working towards Braille uniformity, some measure of success has certainly been achieved.

Previous meetings of experts had recommended that UNESCO establish a World Braille Council. This has now been established and is the culmination of work undertaken by experts from many countries whose efforts UNESCO has tried to assist in every possible way.

APPENDIX III

UNIFORM BRAILLE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD OF EDUCATION, 1941.

The Committee which met in New Delhi, in 1941 to consider the principles which should guide the drawing up of a common Braille code for Indian languages consisted of the following members:—

1. John Sargent, Esq., Educational Commissioner to the Government of India, Chairman.
2. Col. A. M. Dick, Irwin Hospital, New Delhi.
3. Lt.-Col. E. O'G. Kirwan, Professor of Ophthalmology, Medical College, Calcutta.
4. Mr. S. C. Roy, Lecturer, Calcutta University.
5. Mrs. Evelyn Roy, Hon. Recording Secretary, Lighthouse for the Blind, Calcutta.
6. Mr. A. K. Shah, Principal, Calcutta Blind School.
7. Rev. W. G. Speight, Principal and Manager, Schools for the Blind, Palamcottah, South India.
8. Mr. R. M. Halder, Principal, Dadar School for the Blind, Bombay.
9. Mr. H. D. Chatrapati, Principal, Victoria Memorial School for the Blind, Bombay.
10. Miss Georgina Bateman, Superintendent, and Chief Teacher, Blind School, S.P.G. Mission, Ranchi, Bihar.
11. Rao Saheb W. N. Wadegaonkar, Superintendent, Blind Boys' Institute, Nagpur.
12. Mr. P. M. Advani, Principal, School for the Blind, Karachi.
13. Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Luchhmi Dhar Shastri, St. Stephen's College, Delhi.
14. Dr. D. M. Sen, Secretary, Central Advisory Board of Education, Secretary.

APPENDIX IV

EXPERT COMMITTEE ON UNIFORM INDIAN BRAILLE OF THE CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD OF EDUCATION APPOINTED IN 1942.

The above Committee consisted of the following members:—

1. Dr. Sir John Sargent, Educational Adviser to the Government of India, Chairman.
2. Dr. Abdul Haq, Secretary, All India Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu, Delhi.
3. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Head of the Department of Comparative Philology, Calcutta University.
4. Mr. P. M. Advani, Principal, School for the Blind, Karachi.
5. Mr. Kalidas Bhattacharji, Principal, Lady Noyce School for the Deaf and Dumb, New Delhi.

APPENDIX V

RECONSTITUTED EXPERT BRAILLE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The above committee consists of the following members:—

1. Prof. Humayun Kabir, Secretary to the Government of India, Chairman.
2. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Head of the Department of Comparative Philology, Calcutta University.
3. Dr. Abid Husain, Jamia Millia.
4. Mr. P. M. Advani, Headmaster, Home and School for the Blind, Ajmer.
5. Mr. Kalidas Bhattacharji, Manager, Central Braille Printing Press, Dehra Dun.
6. Mr. R. M. Alpaiwalla.
7. Mr. N. N. Sen Gupta, Lecturer, Calcutta University.
8. Miss Mec Moortri, Teacher, Government School for the Blind, Madras.
9. Mr. P. N. V. Rau, former Principal, Government School for the Blind, Madras.
10. Rev. M. C. Langton, former Principal, Schools for the Blind, Palamcottah, (South India).
11. Dr. R. M. Halder, Assistant Educational Adviser to the Government of India, Secretary.

